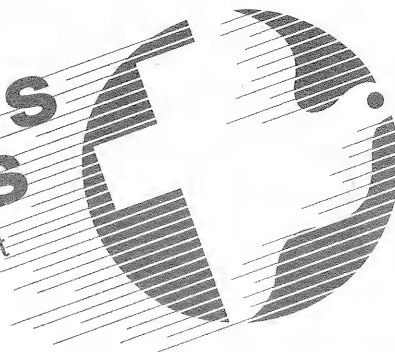


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# Women's Concerns

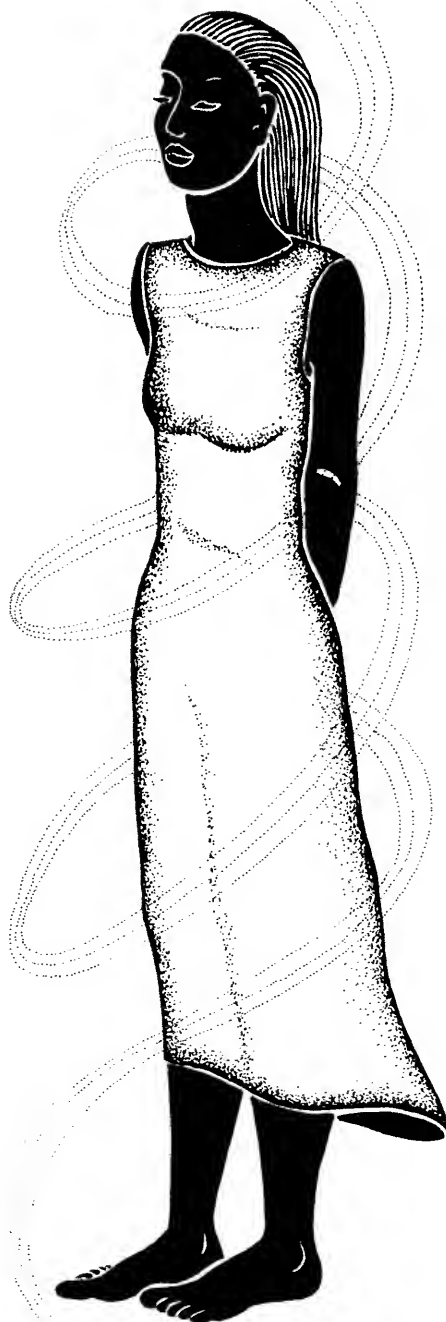
Report



## Creativity and desire: Spirituality through the arts

Stirring the senses, kicking up the dust, playing with the possibilities, fueling passions, making connections, thinking from the heart—the Creator's Spirit-work rejuvenates the earth and her creatures with the creative process. The creative process ever assesses how the many parts fit into the greater whole, making order from chaos. It makes the dry stuff of existence manageable. While breathing hope into grim moments, creativity softens our theology and drivenness. It balances the primacy of the rational, the dominant critic of the past century. By offering playful alternatives, creativity ensures that we live holistically. We are freed from a limited perspective. Above all, the loving ache for beauty empowers—whether we are the creator or the audience.

In this restless, imaginative dance of the trinity, *beauty* is, simply, the Creator Spirit's energy making *truth* and *good* visible. Beauty is God's re-creation breathing through our bones. Beauty brings to life things unimaginable for our healing. This creative energy is Jesus Christ's spirit that played with metaphor, parable and visuals. And so we paint, sing, write, dance, design . . . prayers of confession and lament, of solidarity and bewilderment.

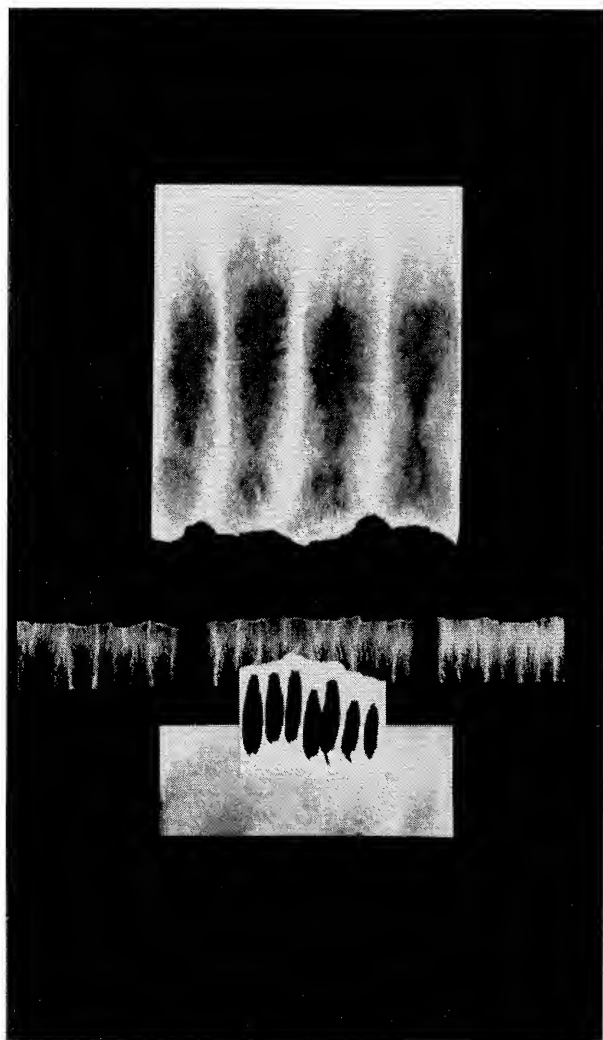


These prayers beget icons of grace, windows to divine understanding created through us, for us, and in spite of us. The Creator's Spirit blows where she will.

In the Anabaptist community where image is suspect and the icon has been primarily the spoken word, the Creator's muse circles looking for a home. She understands the historical barriers, the fears of excess, pride and frivolity. For years she has had to roam incognito through the guise of the domestic and practical arts, maintaining an air of sobriety. Her most passionate expression wound its way into singing, the Anabaptist art of choice.

Music seeped out around the edges of a dawn-to-dusk workday, but few folks had energy to spare for other fine artistry. Somehow the tradition of survival and community life bypassed the cultivation of the deepest personal desires. Well-intentioned doctrine and service offered little time for mystery, wonder or playful imagination. Accountability tallied *truth* and *good* but hardly one's contributions toward *beauty*. For even the beauty of *God's* creation was considered distracting if it interfered with chores or worship! I sensed all of this intuitively while growing up.

Although the Creator's muse circled about me early on in my childhood, it never occurred to me that personal creativity and desire could be a viable way to the heart of God. That



*A Return to Wonder*  
by Mary Lou Weaver Houser

was not popular sermon material. Nor did Bible teachers suggest that we follow Jesus' creative nuance. Conformity overrode the expression of one's unique *imago dei* for most Pennsylvania Mennonites by mid-century. And because women's theological and psychological interpretations have been largely shaped by men, it was even more intimidating for me as a female to recognize and acknowledge my particular desire—to express this gift of God's creative heart-spirit with abandon.

But not to do so is costly for me. Fear can paralyze and foster a disconnection from God deep within me, alienating me from the very source of my passion. If anything that separates one from the divine is sin, then surely "withholding or diminishing our godly creative powers in any human interaction or endeavor is sin," says Chestnut Hill professor Catherine Nerney.

Fear, religious distortion and sexism are among some of the underlying struggles common to many women artists. All the contributors to this issue—Janice, Madeline,

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Elizabeth, Sue, Catherine, Lois, Carol Ann—are artists whose creativity has been impacted by Mennonite theology and practice. These stories, however, reverse the historic atrophy of women's imagination. Whether singing opera, doing art therapy, composing music, or spending hours with the loom, computer, easel or garden, each one is recovering her particular memory and birthright.

Remembering in whose image I am born brings new life and love to the creative process. The art of my prayers is regenerative, for the center of God's creative Being, Wisdom, (Proverbs 8) is in the center of mine. As my fear gives way to love, I discover that, in Teilhard de Chardin's words, "God is at the point of my pen, my pick, my paint brush, my needle—and my heart and my thought." Through these personal icons, the Creator breaks through to me, reconnecting me to others and to the universe.

In a series of art pieces over the past nine years, I have been pursuing themes of transformation and connection with the mothers of the past—human mothers, our earth mother, and Mothering God. All are essentials in the created order. The healing of our wounded creativity involves body, nature, sexuality and the feminine. No longer dare they be banned from the sacred sphere.

As Mennonite women listen intently to the prayers of the heart, we are discovering that God's desire and ours are one—to celebrate and share the extravagance of life and love. Our desire for beauty is God's mysterious wonder, luring us, empowering us. The desire of our prayer is to be one with that spirited Beauty, God incarnate here, now, and finally to find ourselves at home with the mind and heart of our Maker in trinity's life-giving dance.

—Mary Lou Weaver Houser, compiler

**For Mary Lou creativity was a means of survival in a farm family of nine. Creativity also sustains her now as an artist, educator, spiritual director, parent and gardener. Mary Lou and her husband, Rod, put their marriage to the test recently; together they designed and published her book about 15 generations of the Swiss-Anabaptist Wäber-Weber-Weaver family line, *A Weaver's Source Book: Uphome with Jonas and Emma*.**

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by Elizabeth Anthony

## No Graven Images

*Thou shalt make no graven images,  
Said Pastor, of our God*

'cept maybe in Sunday school's dark  
cool basement that smells of blue

violet-blue and blue-violet crayons,  
honey-brown graham crackers, maybe down there,  
some god-thumb-pressed out of homemade  
playdoh, maybe

that'd be alright

but where'd he get off, then, slathering the bare  
walls of the meetinghouse with his wordy fresco,  
some Mennonite Michelangelo ranting the last judgement  
onto the walls, all colored, too, to keep us in

line. So I went out

side where imagination and the garden  
variety snake grew by the yard

where dandelions tittered that good and weed are relative  
to the ilks of appetites, and trees uncrossed, eased


out minty leaves that held the god more lightly  
like breath, I cannot say  
the poem that will not stay  
within the lines.

It's lived, this tree that grows  
its roots torn up

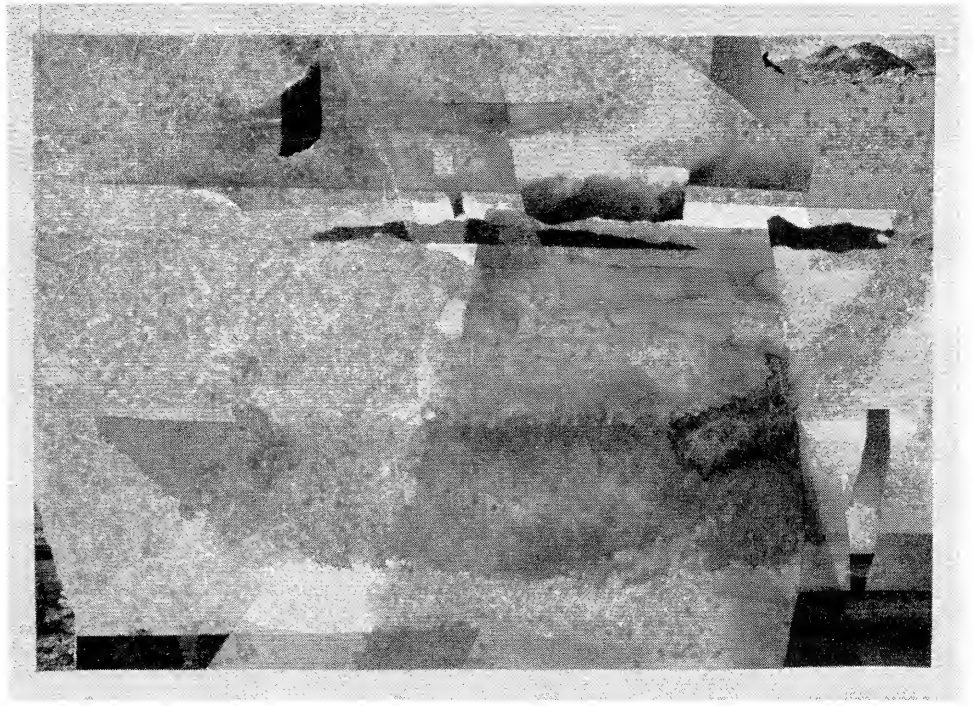
and traveling to suck the water that abides

in air

I play there



"The creative process lifts me out of my immediate situation. It is also an excellent antidote to depression."



**Untitled**  
by Susan McKay

by Susan McKay

## The creative process

As long as I can remember I have wanted to create things and express myself visually. A box of crayons and some paper could entertain me for hours. I have continued to explore artistic activities, and I am convinced that it is something I almost need to do. If I fail to find a creative outlet, I have a sense of frustration and dryness. As my circumstances change, what I create changes. I have recently found cooking and childcare to be surprisingly much more creative than I had anticipated.

To be creative is to give birth to something new, to take the givens in a situation and find a unique and original solution. Existing solutions may have inspired it but of itself, it is something new. Being creative also allows an individual's unique personality to emerge in the end. This is how new ideas continually appear. Such creativity is a reflection of God's creative Spirit, who continues to create new and original things from barrenness and whose creative acts bear the imprint of his loving personality.

For me the creative process begins as an initial response to something I see in my daily wanderings: a texture, an object or a juxtaposition of shapes and colors set me thinking and cause me to respond in some way. Often it helps to be focused on a specific project and looking actively for that stimulation as I wander and observe rather than just waiting for inspiration to strike. Looking at the work of other artists, at their ideas and solutions to problems, also provides me with insights that feed my creative process. When I begin work, I do not often have a clear idea of the end product; rather I begin with a sense

of something which would be interesting to explore. Even when I think I know what I am aiming at, the finished article is often quite different.

Having begun the process, I continue by responding to what I have started to make or by adding to it in some way. Sometimes I spend considerable time investigating the potential of different options before proceeding. For example, I might temporarily overlay a possible piece of collage using masking tape, or I might do a sketch of the whole work and explore the implications of going in different directions. I rarely abandon any projects altogether. Some work flows smoothly and quickly. Other pieces I agonize over. My initial ideas generally need to be developed and refined before I can fully implement them. I often find it helpful to look at my earlier work to see how I solved problems before. At this stage I engage in a lot of thinking without actually doing anything.

Finally, I need to decide when something is finished. This is the hardest and most time-consuming part of the process. The temptation to add more and more to a work tends to overdo the project. Yet I like things to look quite sparse and simple, and I need to be careful to add enough to complete a work.

If a period of time passes during which I am not creating, I have to make myself start again by doing something, almost anything. Then I can once again begin to tap into

**"We are unaware of time passing when we create. I forget the daily problems I face and am able to focus on something different. The process brings inspiration to my whole life."**

**"There is no real way to explain the terror of walking into a living room-sized studio and bleating forth renditions of very loud, very melodramatic music in foreign languages for "important" people who sit only a few feet away."**

my creative processes, and one piece of work carries me into the next, sometimes even giving shape to that next project. Once stimulated, my mind often overflows with ideas, and the problem becomes less one of inspiration and more one of selection and decision.

As years go by, my past experiences, ideas and works of art feed my current projects. Inspiration can come from diverse activities, and I am continually surprised by the links I can make. For example, learning to improvise on the saxophone has been a remarkably similar process to developing an abstract painting. Or I can apply an idea from sewing in one of my paintings. I also come back to an idea years later through a completely different route; some visual ideas seem to recur unconsciously in my work. I can struggle to produce something and when it's done discover that it is the same as a painting I produced long ago.

I continually try to create something I enjoy and find interesting to look at. Since much of my work is abstract, many people want to know what the work represents. Although many of my pictures have a definite feel of a season or of an element, such as sky or sea, the work is genuinely intended for visual enjoyment and pleasure.

I think for long periods between adding different areas of paint or sections of whatever medium I am using. Sometimes I struggle over particular areas, and often add something when I am not entirely certain of the outcome. It is frequently hard work. However, it is also a process in which I find stimulation and refreshment from the stresses of caring for small children. The creative process lifts me out of my immediate situation. It is also an excellent antidote to depression.

In her book *Drawing on the Artist Within*, Betty Edwards talks about the way our brains function when we are being creative. We are unaware of time passing when we create. I forget the daily problems I face and am able to focus on something different. The process brings inspiration to my whole life and being.

**Susan is from Great Britain but living in Harrisonburg, Va. while her husband, Alistair, is studying. Now a full-time mother of two children, she previously worked for 10 years as an architect. Her present creative interests are in water-color, textiles and collaged abstract paintings, but she has also worked with other media, including drawing, screen-printing, papermaking and ceramics.**

**by Madeline Bender**

## **Creativity: Facing the fear**

Since moving to New York City five years ago to pursue an opera career, I have experienced many scary things, including killer cab rides, the frighteningly high price of a cup of Starbucks coffee, and the smell of the subway in August. But the thing that makes my knees knock most of all is auditioning. Hate them as I may, I have auditions to thank for teaching me what I know about my fear as an artist.

There is no real way to explain the terror of walking into a living room-sized studio and bleating forth renditions of very loud, very melodramatic music in foreign languages for "important" people who sit only a few feet away. I love to sing opera because of its largeness, its imaginative quality and its romance. I love wearing wigs, rhinestones, and big, luxurious costumes. I love the exhilaration of filling a huge hall with a perfectly placed high C and hearing the roar of a full orchestra rumbling up beneath me from the pit. I love opera.

But singing opera and auditioning for opera are a far cry apart. The stern people sitting behind the folding tables in audition rooms are much too close. My audition dress has no corset or velvet train. The pianist, try as she might, cannot remotely replicate the full rich sonorities of an orchestra. Worst of all, there is no stage.

Opera auditioning is a convention that is tolerated but not loved by singers and judges alike. Judges complain about it because they have to hear up to 50 singers in one day. Singers hate it because it is ridiculous.

If I could pick one audition experience as the most painful, the most humiliating, and yet the most educational, I wouldn't bat an eye before I said, "The Chicago Lyric

**"I love wearing wigs, rhinestones, and big, luxurious costumes. I love the exhilaration of filling a huge hall with a perfectly placed high C and hearing the roar of a full orchestra rumbling up beneath me from the pit. I love opera."**

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Finals." Most singers have a battle story like mine. We collect them and brag about them during coffee breaks like a bunch of decorated generals.

My story starts out happily enough, in the spring of 1997. After a year of struggle with my singing, I finally found the courage to leave my first voice teacher for a new one. Things with my new teacher were going remarkably well, and she had recommended me for the extremely prestigious and competitive Chicago Lyric Opera's apprenticeship program. I prepared carefully for the preliminary auditions, hoping to make a good impression by working with a handful of knowledgeable coaches in addition to my weekly voice lessons.

When I went into the Julliard building to sing for the Chicago people in April, I was feeling confident and rested. The audition went beautifully, and in about a week I received a letter informing me that I was under consideration for the final round. They would let me know by mid-July if I had been selected to audition in Chicago. For the finals, the Chicago Lyric Opera flies 20 or so of its favorite singers to Chicago, puts them up in a fine hotel and provides them with coaching from the opera house's best coaches. At the end of the weekend it marches them all out on the stage of one of the world's finest opera houses to sing for the head of the company. It is a fabulous honor.

On the basis of my bad luck with auditions up to that point, I counted it a major victory to make it to the "under consideration" phase and continued planning a trip to Italy. My trip had been in the works all year, and I was assuming that I wouldn't get farther than the "under consideration" letter.

But to be honest, I still felt that little jolt of adrenaline each time I walked to the mailbox for the rest of that summer. In my heart of hearts I hoped that I might hear the impossible

and be invited to the finals. But the middle of July drew near and then passed with no word from Chicago. So, I packed my suitcase and tried to get on with things.

The day before my flight for a month of Italian study, Chicago called me. I had made it to the finals! They were the day *after* I got home from Italy. The discount ticket I had purchased with grant money did not allow me to change my date of departure or return.

When I showed up in Chicago one month later, I was jet-lagged and under-coached. My selections were mostly a bunch of new, under-rehearsed arias, and I had not had a voice lesson for months. I was scared out of my wits, having suddenly realized that a month's worth of Italian study wasn't doing me a bit of good at the moment.

What I remember about the big, exciting finals weekend is mostly a blur of tears, insomnia, fainting spells from a medication that was supposed to help my dried-out, swollen vocal chords, nasty words from the pianist, and pitying looks from my competitors when I walked off stage in shame. It was a disaster, I was a disaster, and I left with my tail lodged securely between my legs.

If I begin to tally the mistakes that led me into that awful experience, I will have to start my own magazine. The point is not so much how miserably I blew it, but how terribly I handled my fear. I was completely immobilized by it. Certainly I had set myself up for disaster by making every mistake in the book before I even showed up, but those mistakes were nothing compared to the craziness that ensued.

I found myself completely lacking in what my cousin Madita (a high school field hockey star) calls "mental toughness." I cracked when the chips were down. I was my own worst enemy. I pumped my head with every worry, every negative thought, every put-down known to modern psychotherapy, and I put the tape on continuous play.

After Chicago I wish I could say I pulled myself together and got on with life. Instead I must admit, I sulked. I did so for at least three months. My mother says that I shed more tears over this one audition than over all of my lost loves put together. I was horribly depressed because I had concluded that I didn't have the "mental toughness" to be



**"When we artists are doing our jobs well, we will feel calm and joy (Vincent van Gogh aside). The idea that an artist has to be in a state of hysteria and misery in order to be "passionate" about creating or performing is dangerously wrong."**

**"Expecting the worst will not make it hurt less when it happens. Expecting the best often encourages the best to happen."**

an opera singer. I repeated the mantra over and over, "You aren't strong enough, you aren't strong enough. . . ." It was bad. I don't know what snapped me out of this childish attitude, but somewhere in those three months I started to read about winning. I read everything from Norman Vincent Peale to books on sports psychiatry. I came across the idea that a champion is defined in adversity. I figured, "Here I am in adversity (self-inflicted, true, but adversity nonetheless); I may as well take advantage of it." And so I began to redefine my Chicago experience.

I decided to learn something from it. Here is a list of the 10 most obvious lessons learned from failure:

1. Opera is not brain surgery. Luckily as an artist I don't have anyone's life on the line. I'm singing because it's supposed to be inspiring and fun.
2. Learn from failures and forgive myself. Punishing myself for failures by logging the appropriate amount of hours worrying and feeling guilty over them is not going to prevent them from recurring.
3. Things happen when they are supposed to. It's more advisable to trust the timing of Providence than my own mortal scheduling. If blowing the audition sent me into such hysteria, I clearly wasn't ready to be involved in a program as challenging as Chicago's. Eventually I will be ready to handle a job of that caliber, and then another opportunity will come along.
4. I must not be desperate or needy. When we artists are doing our jobs well, we will feel calm and joy (Vincent van Gogh aside). The idea that an artist has to be in a state of hysteria and misery in order to be "passionate" about creating or performing is dangerously wrong.
5. Expecting the worst will not make it hurt less when it happens. Expecting the best often encourages the best to happen.

6. Art is always more fun if the artist is prepared for the job. Excellence is no accident. Practice may not make perfect, but it will make the performance more fun.
7. Allow myself to crash and burn. It will greatly reduce the number and severity of the crashes and the burning.
8. No mistake, no matter how devastating, has the power to ruin my life. There is always, always a second chance at a dream.
9. I must believe in myself and never quit.
10. I must never, ever again underestimate jet lag!

So, that's my story of defeat and the lessons I learned from it. But, I also have a happy ending. After all the doom and gloom I preached to myself after my Chicago demise last year and after thinking that I could never show my face anywhere near the opera house again . . . the phone rang. It was the very same company inviting me back for a second chance. In a few months, I will be singing in the finals in Chicago.

I don't believe that what happened last year was predestined to teach me a lesson. I take full responsibility for the whole mess. But, I feel certain that I am much stronger going to the finals this year because of the ordeal I was allowed to suffer. And, unlike last year at this time, I am not begging God to "pleeeeeease" let me get in.

I have a new attitude. This year I have a little courage and a little confidence. I know that God will take care of me and my artistry whether I get into the program or not, whether I flop or not, whether I "deserve it" or not. This year I am begging a lot less and thanking God a lot more. As Paul says, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt." This year I am a believer.

**Madeline is an opera singer based in New York City. She earned her Masters degree from Manhattan School of Music in 1996. She has performed the roles of Pamina in the *Die Zauberflöte* in Spain and France, Marzellina in *Fidelio* with Connecticut Grand Opera, Valencienne in *Die Lustige Witwe* with Opera Illinois, Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* with Tulsa Opera and made her debut at the Kennedy Center singing Mimi in *La Bohème* with Capital City Opera. She is a two time finalist for the Chicago Lyric's apprentice program.**



"April sat for a long time looking at my paintings. After a while, I was so curious that I asked her what she was thinking about. She looked at me with sparkling eyes and said, 'It's like being inside a dream that nobody understands.' I don't have words for what she saw or for the gift that she gave me that day."

by Juanita Yoder Kauffman

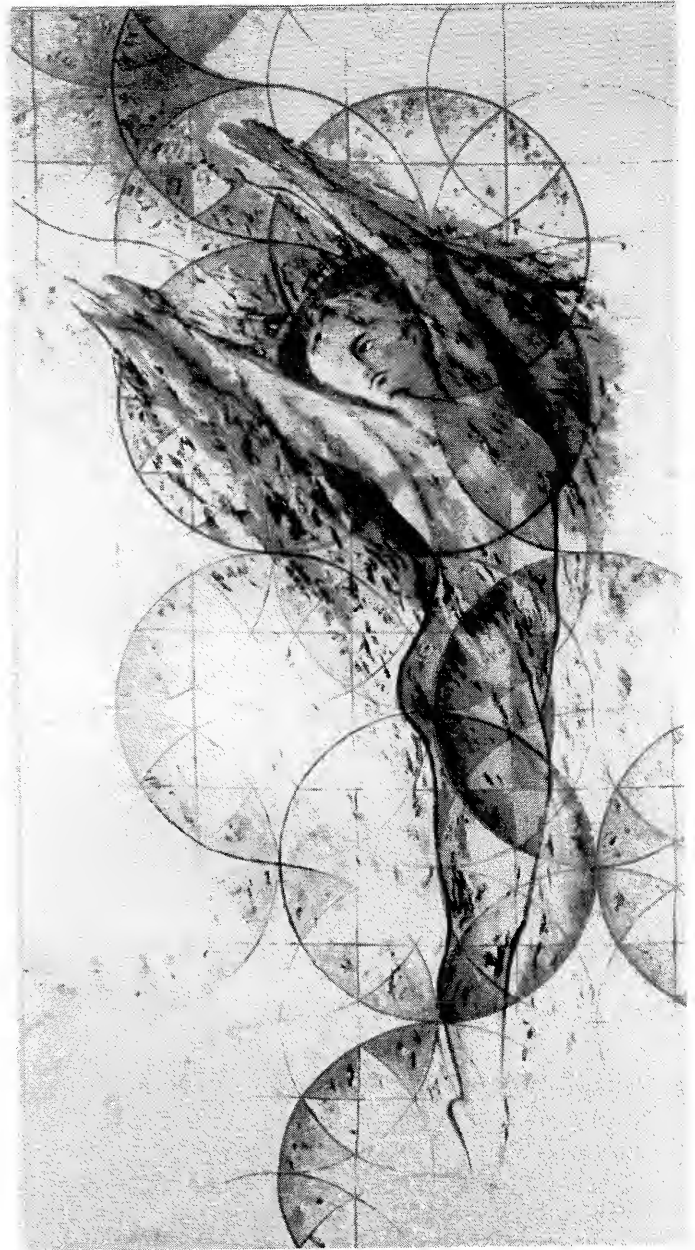
## Conversations with the Divine: Art as service

Creating artwork is my way of listening and responding to the Divine, experiencing and expressing transformation, and receiving and offering nourishment. My creative process begins with quieting myself and listening to what I will call the Divine. Some of the most valuable time for me as an artist includes studying the shape of a tree against the sky as dusk slowly changes the clouds, noticing the iridescent colors on a mourning dove, or just enjoying a good cup of tea or coffee.

In *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art*, author Madeleine L'Engle writes, "... being time is never wasted time. When we are being, not only are we collaborating with chronological time, but we are touching on *Kairos* and are freed from the normal restrictions of time. In moments of mystical illumination we may experience, in a few chronological seconds, years of transfigured love."

It is during moments such as these that a painting idea may become imprinted on my mind and clamor to be "born." Sometimes only one element such as the subject or color composition of a painting will come into focus, with the rest of the piece unfolding during its creation. I tend to think in pictures, so my "being" time involves absorbing and synthesizing images. Drawing and painting is my concrete response to the Divine, as well as my response to the intense beauty and horrible ugliness I see on this earth. The dialogue would not be complete if I didn't carry out the work.

L'Engle writes, "To work on a book is for me very much the same thing as to pray. Both involve discipline. If the artist works only when he feels like it, he's not apt to build up much of a body of work. The largest part of the job of the artist is to listen to the work, and to go where it tells him to go. Ultimately, when you are writing, you stop thinking and write what you hear."



**World Without End: Ascension**  
by Juanita Yoder Kauffman

On a good day of painting, I feel like I am continuing a conversation among the Divine, the art materials and all parts of my being.

Creating a piece of artwork is sometimes a response to personal change, and at the same time I may experience transformation while making the art. A painting or drawing then becomes a visual record of my experiences. Drawing a repeated pattern or making regular brush marks can serve as a type of meditation for me. One morning, after being notified of the death of a friend, I began a drawing involving the "world without end" quilt pattern of interlocking circles (one of my favorite patterns). This drawing helped



**"In this short life, I can see no better way to invest myself than to serve as listener to the Divine, to people, and to the earth and synthesize my response into images."**

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me salvage some shred of the day and eventually became the painting on silk, "World Without End: Ascension." In an interview with art critic Suzi Gablik, Satish Kumar states, "... from the traditional Indian point of view, art is a way of replenishing the soul. And also the society. Because we are constantly using ourselves, there is a wear and tear of our souls." I like to think of my art as celebrating what is good in life and working toward healing of what is broken in myself and others.

Art is a "feast" for the eyes and for the soul which goes beyond the mere act of looking at a surface. I gain fulfillment from conversations with other artists about their artwork, and also from basking in good music. To enjoy an in-depth article on the highly spiritual video art of Bill Viola is as nourishing to me as good bread. I find that digesting art requires spending time with the artwork to engage my imagination and spirit.

At an art show in Nappanee, Indiana, a young girl named April sat for a long time looking at my paintings. After a while, I was so curious that I asked her what she was thinking about. She looked at me with sparkling eyes and said, "It's like being inside a dream that nobody understands." I don't have words for what she saw or for the gift that she gave me that day. "Language is fundamentally art and art is fundamentally language," writes Gordon Kaufman in 1965 issue of *Mennonite Life*. When my own or others' artwork sparks conversation, then I am listening again and have come full circle... and yet farther along in my continuous exploration.

In a highly personal and spiritual way, art is essential to my being. Gordon Kaufman writes, "Far from being a dispensable luxury, [the artist] is the servant of us all at the deepest level of our needs as selves and communities. In this sense of dealing with the most profound levels of life and experience, all art has an important religious function." In this short life we are given, I can see no better way to invest myself than to serve as listener to the Divine, to people, and to the earth and synthesize my response into images.

## References

Duncan, Micheal. "Bill Viola: Altered Perceptions," *Art in America* (March, 1998) p. 62-69. This thorough review of Viola's spiritual art based on real life images was very inspiring to me.

Gablik, Suzi. *Conversations Before the End of Time: Dialogues on Art, Life and Spiritual Renewal* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995). This is a wonderfully diverse collection of discussions on the spiritual and ecological necessity for art. Gablik interviews 18 people regarding the place and function of art. Gablik says, "... these multiple views actually form a coherent picture, in some sense, if we can encompass them all. They constitute an ongoing group process of understanding."

Kaufman, Gordon D. "The Significance of Art," *Mennonite Life* (January, 1965) p. 5-7. I found this to be a compelling article about the function of art as a form of communication in a society as well as in the church.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *Walking on Water, Reflections on Faith and Art* (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw, 1980). L'Engle's compilations of thoughts, musings and inspirations regarding faith and art are deeply personal. This is a motivating and encouraging book to keep on the night stand, and worth reading several times.

Juanita's works with dyes on silk explore human, celestial and natural forms. Her artwork has been widely exhibited in the United States including New York's SoHo art district, and in Dusseldorf, Germany. Her artwork is in collections at Goshen (Ind.) College, Eastern Mennonite University (Va.), The Inter-Church Center (N.Y.), and Princeton University, (N.J.). Juanita's other work includes hand-painted silk scarves and ties and, more recently, painted silk for Julie Musselman, a Mennonite clothing designer in Pennsylvania. She is a graduate of Goshen College and has an M.A. in art from Eastern Illinois University. Kauffman lives in Goshen, Ind., with her husband, Kenneth and their 5-year-old son, Niko.

**"For a long time it was not enough for me simply to paint and enjoy the creative process. I was compelled to find value in what I was doing. I wanted to know my work could be of service to others and aid in my own spiritual growth."**

**"We are more complete if the arts are part of our lives. We heighten our intelligence and insight in all areas as a result of connecting with the arts."**

by Janice Leppke

## *Healing through the arts:* **Learning to value my gift**

*"I learn by going where I have to go."*  
—Theodore Roethke

It has been a long struggle to become an artist. I admit I have spent a great deal of time defending my choice. Mostly the defense has been aimed at that inner voice that accuses me of spending too much time and energy on creating pictures. It asks that nagging question, "What is the good in this?" For a long time it was not enough for me simply to paint and enjoy the creative process. I was compelled to find value in what I was doing. I wanted to know my work could be of service to others and aid in my own spiritual growth. I wanted to be blessed.

As I passed through these necessary steps toward validation, I did find the blessing. Art is a vital component in my search for wholeness. I was supported by a community of believers who saw potential in my quest and by my husband and daughters who honestly critiqued my work. I watched my daughters' reactions to my venture and realized that I was giving them a gift by modeling a life in pursuit of a worthy passion. I was becoming who I was meant to be.

My journey led me through graduate studies where I explored the link between visual arts and language arts. At this junction I found that all of us come closer to completeness by exploring the arts. Most recently I have made the effort to examine God as artist. Genesis 1 is a remarkable passage when seen through an artist's lens. It has led me to believe more deeply that God created us to create and to carry on in the image of creator. I no longer find it necessary to defend my life as an artist but I do treasure the path that led me through this essential growth process.

This process began before I can remember. The artist in me has always been there. My earliest memories are tied to drawing or making something. I've always known that

while creating something I lose track of time, yet I ignored the call to be an artist until I was well into my 30s. By this time I was married with two children, and I had a career as an elementary school teacher. As I scaled back my teaching career after the birth of our second daughter, I was finally ready to pursue painting seriously. I confided to just a few people close to me that I wanted to become a professional artist.

I was well on my way when an opportunity to attend graduate school presented itself. I would eventually gain my master's degree in education with an emphasis in reading. This segment of my life allowed me to merge my teaching career with my life as an artist. Thanks to the professors at Fresno Pacific University, I was encouraged to connect the visual arts to language arts whenever possible. Ultimately my Master's thesis explored this amazing link between visual arts and language arts. I discovered endorsement for my life as an artist in the academic world.

My graduate studies confirmed that we are more complete if the arts are part of our lives. We heighten our intelligence and insight in all areas as a result of connecting with the arts. I have been influenced by Howard Gardner of Harvard University. He names spatial intelligence, which includes visual art, as one of the seven intelligences, all equal in value. I began to look at intelligence in a nontraditional sense. This new view cast a positive light on my self image. I realized God works in us as we create, and our brains work better if we pay attention to the arts—we simply become more complete as God intended.

As I truly began to believe that God worked through the arts and the artist, I gradually uncovered the core of who I am. I became more passionate about my art and about the connections it had to all facets of my life, including my spiritual life. One important key to my spiritual validation as an artist has been my church community.



*Calla*  
by Janice Lepke

"I have been inspired by the account of the creation process in Genesis 1. Creative decisions are made daily in this six-day account. Before God returns to the new day a retreat is implied. In the

morning God approaches the job again and builds on the decisions of the day before. I want to believe that the Almighty Creator had a great time playing with the materials that formed our universe."

C. G. Jung could have been describing a facet of God's nature when he says, "The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect but by play instinct acting out of inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves." Joyfully playing and knowing that the ultimate Creator is working in me to accomplish a good thing satisfies. I am sharing the heart of God as I also form something out of nothing.

I am further encouraged by the end of the creation account; God turns over creation to the humans. This is like giving one's masterpiece over to a young student to continue the work. What a divine risk. What an act of respect. With this act God gave us the chance to learn that we are creators. I believe that God, as the ultimate teacher, knows that students learn best by doing. As a teacher and artist, I struggle to follow God's example of trust.

I have been fortunate to be a member of College Community Mennonite Brethren Church during the past 25 years. This community of believers is committed to the importance of art in worship. Because of their encouragement I was able to step out and take risks that linked my painting to spiritual insight. This community encouraged and accepted my visual interpretations of sermons and worship themes. Often they saw more than I saw in what I created; sometimes they were confused. Agnes De Mille says, "The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark." I continue to give thanks for this community and their support as I leap in the dark.

Currently, in my spiritual quest, I am looking at God as creator/artist. I have been inspired by the account of the creation process in Genesis 1. It is similar to the process I use when I paint: create, retreat and return with fresh eyes in the morning. Whether one takes this creation account as literal or poetic, there is no doubt that God is described as an artist. Creative decisions are made daily in this six-day account. Before God returns to the new day a retreat is implied. In the morning God approaches the job again and builds on the decisions of the day before. I want to believe that the Almighty Creator had a great time playing with the materials that formed our universe.

Accepting myself as imperfect and growing in the image of God is a good place to be. I know that I am using a gift God has given me, and this gift is making me more complete in all areas. I still require support and am receiving this from community, church and family. I paint now because I see and know better when I do. Color, detail, the effects of light and who I am are more apparent to me when I am actively working at my art. Not to paint is to be incomplete, partially blind, less than God intends for me. I value myself, the artist.

**Janice is a water-color artist from Fresno, Calif. She is currently exhibiting, painting and teaching occasional children's classes at The Door Gallery, a joint venture involving 10 female artists. Janice and her husband, Ken, are the parents of Allison, Andrea and Laura. They are members of the College Community Mennonite Brethren Church.**

"I learned the art of observation—what to say and how to do what was expected of me. Oh, the energy expended in pretending! And one day, I no longer knew what it was that I wanted to say or do. I had lost myself and my way."

by Lois Weaver

## *Healing through the arts:* **Born a weaver**

I was born to be a weaver and given new and delicate life-threads of inquisitiveness, freedom of expression, and bliss with which to weave. Until one day—I'm not sure how or why it happened—the threads I was using became dull and lifeless, transforming my intricate, bright weave into a most unattractive piece of fabric.

### **Ugly threads on my loom**

#### *threads of suppressed questions*

I learned early not to ask questions. Everyone else seemed to know the "right" answers. I thought I was supposed to know too.

#### *threads of pretense*

I desperately needed approval so I pretended to be someone I wasn't and could never be. I learned the art of observation—what to say and how to do what was expected of me. Oh, the energy expended in pretending! And one day, I no longer knew what it was that I wanted to say or do. I had lost myself and my way.

#### *threads of judgment*

"Judge not that you may be not judged" (Matthew 7:1). Even though I knew that verse well, my entire life was spent judging others and expecting them to judge me. I desperately needed others' approval.

#### *threads of fear*

I was consumed with fear, believing that others were as critical and judgmental as I. I envied those who seemed free to create and explore. I was so afraid of failure that I didn't even try.

#### *threads of self-hatred*

Spun all together, suppressed questions, pretense, judgment and fear produced a thick, lumpy thread of self-hatred. I was going through life being who I thought I was supposed to be—jumping at everyone else's beck and call. I was a spineless person with no direction, no feeling of self-worth—a completely lost soul.

### **The journey**

My wake-up call came while parenting my hyperactive son. Given my lack of confidence, I felt unsuccessful as his mother. Frustration grew into depression, and I entered the "dark night of the soul." Although my exterior package seemed to be put together well, inside I was falling apart. I sought the help of a therapist, a very wise woman who helped me begin to question and find some answers.

For the first time I realized I had choices in my life. I could choose to see myself as a victim and remain in the underworld, or I could choose happiness and move forward. The decision to change had a price. If I followed wisdom's voice within me, rather than the voices of the "shoulds" from childhood, I risked facing disapproval and misunderstanding from those close to me.

At first I was angry at the past I had been given—my family and my church. But slowly, I began to realize that those who had raised me had the best intentions. It was my choice to accept the teachings that work for me and leave the rest behind, honoring their purpose in my life. I began to make decisions that would lead me in a new direction.

As a child I was a poor student and was discouraged from further academic pursuits after high school. I had never thought of myself as creative or artistic, but the vocational tests I took clearly directed me toward the arts. I was soon to discover that my self-image as a scatterbrain was actually evidence of my creative right brain at work.



**"After the initial fear had worn off, I felt as if I had come home at last to this radical new world. Symbols, images and colors spoke to me deeply in profound personal truths too complex to articulate. I was like a sponge absorbing information I had subconsciously longed to know. This new world was filling a deep void in my spirit."**

**"Every day as I sit at my loom or stir my dye pots, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the life I now lead. I wake up each morning knowing I am doing what I was born to do, convinced that learning never ends."**

I had never tried to paint in grade school: I couldn't draw a straight line or color within the lines. When I entered college full-time at the age of 39, the old insecurities returned intensely. My first day in drawing class I found myself choking back tears, extremely afraid that I wouldn't be able to do it "right."

After the initial fear had worn off, I felt as if I had come home, at last, to this radical new world. Symbols, images and colors spoke to me deeply in profound personal truths too complex to articulate. I was like a sponge absorbing information I had subconsciously longed to know. This new world was filling a deep void in my spirit.

In the art program I discovered the craft of dyeing and weaving. As I stirred my first dye pot, I had the feeling that I had done this before. In fact, I *had* been born a Weaver. My ancestors were weavers in Switzerland before they came to this country. I now carry both my mother's maiden name of Weber (meaning "weaver" in German) and the name of my father which is Weaver. An advisor and art professor pushed me to reach deep inside myself for the trust that I knew was there, a trust that God would lead me to my destination. The adventure was just beginning.

When I graduated from college in 1996, I bought a loom and the accessories I would need to set up a weaving business. My husband has always encouraged me to follow my path, so together we moved our family to a new community to begin a new life. I found a house for sale with the garden of my dreams and a studio in the back yard. A remarkable group of spiritual women artists, writers and healers invited me to join their group where we dance and share together each month. A true "soul sister" came across my path (a silk painter) and currently we travel together and sell our wearable art pieces through boutiques, galleries and shows. Every day as I sit at my loom or stir my dye pots, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the life I now lead. I wake up each morning knowing I am doing what I was born to do, convinced that learning never ends.

We must live life to the fullest and not suppress our spirit by trying to live up to others' expectations for us. I watch my teenage daughter writing poetry and music, perform

ing drama, freely speaking from her heart—open and honest, full of life; I notice my son who, after struggling with his own battles of learning disabilities and self-worth, is now a strong and independent adult. Then I know without a doubt that the struggles of my journey have been worth every minute of pain. I faced the fears—so many fears. I am convinced that the only way to find the light is through the darkness of fear. I had to enter the forest before I could come out on the other side.

### **The new fabric**

I am forever grateful for this journey of learning that keeps me looking within, trusting God and knowing I will find my way. I believe we cannot run away from who we are. If we try to escape, we simply unravel and tangle the old threads no matter where we go. The women who preceded me—my plain aunts and grandmothers and my mother—are a part of who I am. They are the threads of my past. I value their strength and hard work. At the same time I am learning to weave in the new to create the fabric that works for my life now.

Sometimes I forget that person I was before. Recently, while doing a show, I overheard a woman looking at my hand-woven designs say, "I could never do anything like that." I was brought back to reality! That was me only a short time ago. In my wildest dreams, I would not have believed I could do the things I am doing today.

I have rediscovered that I am truly a "Weaver." I am now creating the fabric I was born to weave.

**Lois is a fiber artist who lives with her husband and family in Seaford, Va. She is a juried member in the Association of Virginia Artisans and Blue Skies Gallery. She is a member of Handweavers Guild of America and also active in a local weaving guild. When not weaving she enjoys yoga, walks in the woods, gardening and reading.**

"My supervisor paused,  
leaned forward in his chair,  
looked at me penetratingly,  
and asked, "Are you prepared  
to discard your plans, and go  
along with process, if your  
plans don't work out?"

by Elizabeth Anthony

## Healing through the arts: Personal alchemy

The proscription in my Mennonite heritage against making images of God and my own journey in image-making, hold an opposition that has informed my creativity and my desire for spiritual healing.

In 1987, I began an intensive period of work and master's study in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program at York University in Toronto. There I was able to integrate aspects of my personal heritage, art-making processes and my interest in alchemy. While alchemy is most commonly understood as the work of early chemists who desired to transmute base metals into gold, it also has come to be understood as a spiritual art. The spiritual work occurred because divinity was believed to be hidden in matter; therefore, changes in matter, especially when due to the interventions of the alchemist, were used as a vehicle for inquiring into a cycle of processes. These processes, when conceived as both material and divine, could effect simultaneous transformations in matter and in the self.

The art of alchemy models the two goals available in the fine arts as well. The artist can be *product-oriented* or *process-oriented*. In the former, the artist works devotedly toward the creation of the end product, while in the latter more reflective process, the artist positions her/himself in the existential meanings of being within, and being one of the substances through which the creative process unfolds. Then the artist is motivated by the desire not simply to make things but to become a more whole person, someone less crazed by the flux of everyday existence. Desire becomes spiritual, and the spiritual quest becomes creative. The seeker looks for a way not known before through which the divisions of self can be healed.

Surrender to process, then, is the door through which one enters. I will never forget the question my thesis supervisor asked when I had laid out my proposal. At the heart of my project was the act of building an outdoor bread oven of clay and stone. I would also research the history of alchemy and its interpretation in Jungian psychology. The

project unified many parts of my self: Such ovens were historically common in Pennsylvania, my home state, and in Quebec, where I now live; I have an early, strong, sensual memory of my grandmother baking at her indoor wood stove; bread-making has always been a passionate act for me and others in my family; the use of a bread oven feminizes the motif of the furnace central to the traditionally male alchemist's work; the project returned my art-making to a site within nature rather than within urban galleries; and the transformation of this sown, sprouted and matured grain into bread, and the further transformation of this bread into the living bodies of those who eat it, is a cycle central to Christian communion services and to many other culture's rituals as well.

After I had laid out these associations and the rituals I foresaw as part of the process of establishing and consecrating the building site, constructing the oven, and baking bread in it, my supervisor paused, leaned forward in his chair, looked at me penetratingly, and asked, "Are you prepared to discard your plans, and go along with process, if your plans don't work out?"

"Oh, yes," I said—too easily.

I chose to build the oven in the center of an old apple grove. I surrounded the central tree with a ring of stones, truncated it to my height, debarked it, wrapped the limbs in strips of white cloth and then felled them. I raised the oven where the tree had been, making the measure if its hearth equal to that of my height. All these actions promoted my identification with the site so that I would increasingly experience manipulations of matter as manipulations of self. The sacrificed tree symbolized several years of my own life that I dedicated to this work. As I carried each large stone gathered from the fence row for the dry-laid wall that became the hearth's foundation, I meditated on its weight as some particular heaviness of experience within my past. It could, reworked, offer a foundational insight contributing to the transformational work undertaken.





These processes involved contemplation, toil, sweat and tears as I researched, planned, hauled, journaled the process and relevant dreams and drew images of these. Sacred work and sacred play were meaningfully interwoven in the unfolding project. In retrospect, however, I would term this part of the process as *preliminary* to the *true* work. Within the word *preliminary* lies the root, *limen*, meaning threshold. Initially, I would have said that I crossed the threshold of the project when I entered the circle of stones to begin the rituals of identification with the tree. But hindsight shows that was only the threshold of the foyer of the work, not its inner sanctum.

Inevitably, the moment of crossing the *limen* belonging to the *deep* event came. And how could it come about but through a thoroughgoing failure of *plans*, when mastery gives away!

This deep threshold came into view in late autumn. The solitary process culminated in a community event on the Day of Atonement when friends and I raised the oven's clay dome. A while after that, I began to aid the clay in its drying process by lighting small fires in the oven's interior, as recommended in manuals. An early frost seemed only to craze the exterior of the damp clay with crystalline "trees" that I smoothed over later in the day. But one morning, with mounting despair, I approached the oven to examine what the dark line on its surface, visible from a distance, was. A crack had appeared, its depth the full thickness of the clay. Attempts at "patching" proved futile. It was this "fault line" that showed itself to be the true threshold of the work. The wholeness I had felt when sealing the dome seemed irrevocably parted.

I had *desired* a process, but a process that had a functioning oven at its end. And now, that object had been taken from me, and the trajectory of the creative cycle was skewed. The time I had invested in the project seemed wasted; my master's thesis was in jeopardy, having a crumbling object at its heart.

This crisis indeed resulted in a failure of heart. Creativity and desire had taken me into a deeper wounding, which felt not at all healing, but detrimental to both academic accomplishment and spiritual growth. The oven's fault seemed to be an emblem for all that was not right about myself, mocking my commitment to the use of creative

process to heal and transform. And so, I entered into that stage of the alchemical cycle called the *nigredo* or *mortificatio*, the death experience, the "dark night of the soul." Many tears later, I found that this time of fertile error, which felt like death, was but the beginning of the true life of the work. My own dying into the work, the moment of "commanding failure," was the moment in which my ego was eclipsed. What is error to the ego is often just the opening required for an epiphany of soul.

A dream initiated the transformative moment. I dreamed of three clay ovens, whose purposes were explained to me by a figure called Mr. Heart: One was for children to play on and learn from, and another was for public viewing, but the true oven was kept in Mr. Heart's garage. This was the one, he said, that must be fired for use. When he took me to it, I saw that it had a window where my oven's "fault line" was, and that within this oven was a seat and, next to it, a circular stairway descending into darkness from which flames brilliantly arose. I knew it to be my sweat lodge, which I had to enter.

I completed my thesis with reflections on the stories of many alchemists failing to make gold, who found their true work in the struggle to come to terms with this failure. Always these chroniclers affirmed the need for the alchemist to maintain a devoted engagement with these materials of the art. As the Chinese alchemist Ko Hung described, in this spiritual art there is neither terminal success nor failure, only tenacity in the continuing investigation of God. The soul's journey is made possible by its intimate correspondence with objects, "graven" images of encounters with god-in-world-stuff, experienced as active images.

About a year later, I participated in a native sweat lodge ceremony, an experience which gave meaningful closure to the work. But I do not want to imply that this journey has achieved full resolution. I experience the oven's fault line as something akin to what the psychoanalyst Balint

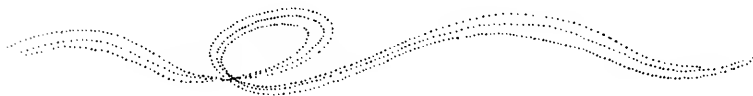
"I had grieved for him in certain stages over the years, but mostly I had considered his death an epic family legend, a Gothic tale ritually recounted every time my mother, sisters and I would explain our lives. But in the

spring of 1997, it was as though he had just died. I began to grieve not only for my mother's and his parents' loss, and of course his own loss of life, but for my own childhood sorrow."

calls "the basic fault," the healing of which may leave a scar that the self will always bear. It was necessary to go outside the sermonized split of my childhood between matter and divinity, as I describe in "No Graven Images," to find out how they are one. Therefore, as an artist and art therapist, I found how art making can heal. Yet I often still stub my toe on that phantom threshold.

But the path of image-making has also taught me that we create *through* the postures our scars' tugs induce. Creativity, desire and spirituality become an enterprise of healing when suffused with compassion. This compassion can only arise from our journeys across the thresholds into human suffering.

**Elizabeth Anthony is an art therapist living and working in Montreal, Quebec, with her daughter, Gabrielle. She came to her profession in mid life, finding it to be the one that best brought together her life experiences, her studies and interest in psychology, and the visual arts. She teaches part-time in the Graduate Program in the Creative Arts Therapies at Concordia University, is Art Therapy Coordinator at the Centre for the Arts in Human Development, and is building a private practice.**



by Carol Ann Weaver

*Healing through the arts:*

## **When words evaporate— music of passage and death**

"When will you write *Deathstory*?" my friend Gloria asks at the memorial service of her partner. We had just talked about *Birthstory*, music I wrote soon after the birth of my daughter Myra. "I can't now—not without experiencing death up close," I find myself mumbling. A touch of prophecy?

Surely my best music is written out of experience, and a woman's experience has rarely been documented within Western art music—imagine Mozart writing about labor pains! It would be impossible for me to write someone else's life (or death) unless I too could feel it from deep within. My first pregnancy, resulting in a painful miscarriage, had brought greater loss than anything I had previously known. Years later when I read Canadian poet Di Brandt's poem, "Song of the Lost" about prenatal death, I knew it was my story too, and I was able to set it to music, as part of the music drama, *Quietly Landed*?

Myra's live, exuberant birth burst forth into *Birthstory*—music interwoven with taped birth stories from various mothers and my midwife, Elsie Cressman. The piece was later beautifully choreographed by an impressive and award-winning troupe of young actors and played to many audiences in Ontario. After one performance a man came and told me he envied women for our ability to bear children.

But going from life to death, that mysterious passage from one life to another which none of us understands? Gloria's question entered my subconscious, finally causing me to deal with my own father's death when I was not yet 2. I had grieved for him in certain stages over the years, but mostly I had considered his death an epic family legend, a Gothic tale ritually recounted every time my mother, sisters and I would explain our lives. But in the

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**life at that point of death than I ever have. I think that there surely must be a sense of great joy too in moving to that experience and through it."**

spring of 1997, it was as though he had just died. I began to grieve not only for my mother's and his parents' loss, and of course his own loss of life, but for my own childhood sorrow.

Healing started to come as I wrote the first song I had ever written to him (possibly the first anyone had written to him), "Fly Me Over," in which I place flowers at his grave and ask to join him in his eternal flight. After the lyrics, the piano goes off on its own wordless flight. (He died in a plane crash.)

The delivery of this song had several necessary, highly personal stages. I nervously sang a rough version to Canadian singer/songwriter Cate Friesen, in anticipation of our first joint concert. Next, I traveled to Virginia to place flowers at his grave and sing the song to my mother, sisters and close relatives. When Cate and I performed "Fly Me Over" in June 1997, my mother was there in the front row. Emotional as this after-the-fact dealing with death was, I was not prepared for the unfolding saga of my mother and mother-in-law.

In December of 1996 my husband and I had been informed of his mother's breast and bone cancer. In the June 1997 concert I dedicated a piano solo to her—music both gentle and raucous. And by the end of that summer we received news of my mother's acute myeloid leukemia. She was given weeks to live.

How could both our mothers be threatened with death at the same time, both being such Rocks of Gibraltar in our families? Lottie raised four children while her husband distance-trucked; my mother parented three daughters alone. I tried to forget Gloria's question as we made multiple trips both to Manitoba for Lyle's mother and to Virginia for my mother. I remember dancing my wild grief at the '97 Winnipeg Folk Festival, thinking of Lottie. And as we canoed in Algonquin Park my mother's near-death never left me. Being in a wilderness area away from phones or outside communication was like being trapped in the belly of a whale, but I knew I had to go through this "dark night" in preparation for the death of my mother.

On the second solid night of rain, which delayed our packing out of the park, I lay in our cramped, damp tent and made the choice to live in love rather than fear. From that moment on, my mother's impending death seemed like

something I could face. On the portage trail the next day, my first "Mother" song came to me, a song about "love deeper than the ocean" which sustained me all the way back to Virginia. As I sang it for her, her face grew young, illness leaving her for a moment. The song later became a choral piece which premiered at the 1998 Cincinnati Mennonite Arts Festival, dedicated to my mother.

"Death is the hardest thing I've ever had to face. And nothing can take away that sense of sadness at giving up life which has been very precious to me. . . . I think that I will surely know more about life at that point of death than I ever have. I think that there surely must be a sense of great joy too in moving to that experience and through it," said my mother less than a week before her death.

At the end of her life, words were rare with Mom. I mostly sat at the piano and played her favorite hymns, and though she couldn't talk, she often sang along in her steady alto.

Mother's last night was in itself a form of wordless music, punctuated by her shallow, gasping breaths which I timed every seven minutes (the number seven, chosen arbitrarily, seemed to have sacred significance—Seven Asian Churches and Seven Seals in Revelation). I was expecting her breaths to become fewer; instead they became softer and quieter—a rapid but perfectly tapered decrescendo of breath and sound, mirroring her fast-paced illness.

I was unprepared for the sublime beauty as well as the sheer grief of that night, which became the most sacred moment of my life. This was the first human death I had witnessed and the first time I had heard a person's life sounds—Mother's 75 years of breathing, speaking, singing, moving—give way to total silence. An uncanny symmetry—at my birth she heard me from silence to sound, and at her death I heard her from sound to silence.

I wouldn't rush to compose music from that night, with its number seven's, decrescendos and silence. It took half a lifetime to compose my "Father song." However, a short refrain began to visit me three months later. As if to prove its existence, the refrain sent me to Toronto to

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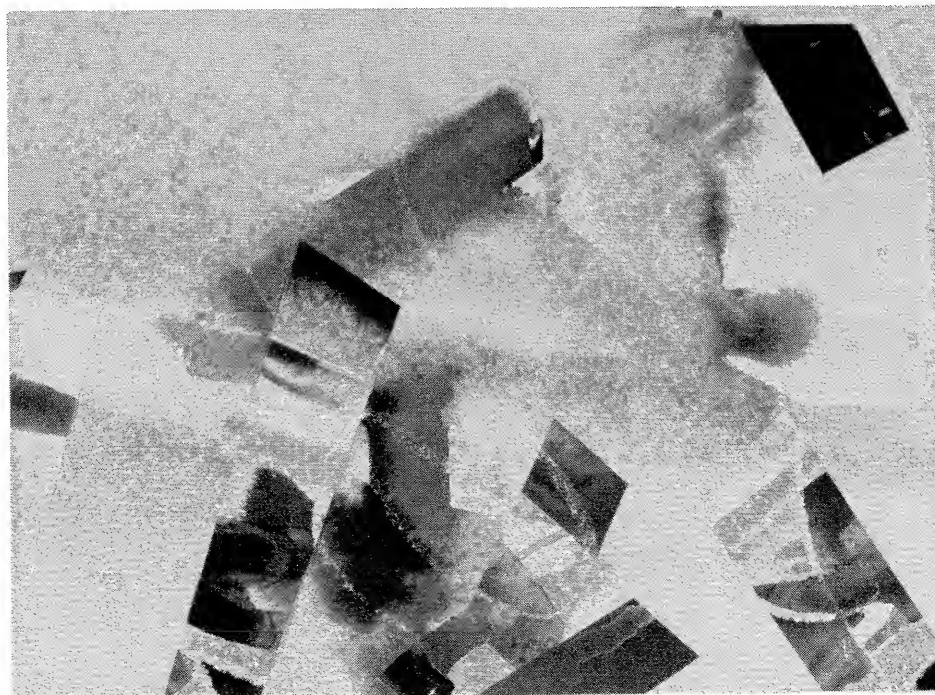
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my first Aretha Franklin concert, where, above her glorious soul voice, the tune was still singing in my head, "Fare you well to the other side." I knew the song was meant to be heard.

Spring 1998 became memorial concert time. Cate Friesen and I traveled to Massachusetts to perform a memorial concert for my friend Donna's son Christopher Burkhardt, whose early, tragic death touched many. Back in Ontario we did several tribute concerts—one for both my mother and Christopher, and one just for my mother, or so I thought. But Lyle's mother died weeks before this concert, so we extended the memorial to her as well. Only days before the concert my two mothers from their Place of Privilege delivered to me yet another song, "You'll Carry On," which I had no choice but to perform that night. Again, symmetries. My first concert with Cate honored my father. Now, a year later, my mothers. The CD I am recording with Cate, *Journey Begun*, is in honor of these three travelers whose passing on is changing my life.

So I am beginning to write this music, but it is more "passage" than "death" music. Gloria seemed to know my journey to this intersection between life and death would soon begin. Within "bira" ceremonies the Shona of Zimbabwe use the "mbira" (thumb piano) to recall spirits of the deceased. The *mbira* I acquired in Africa inspires me to begin listening to these voices, to find this time of crystallized focus, rare beauty, and refined, distilled essence when life and death meet, when words evaporate, when spirit has its own way.

**Composer/pianist Carol Ann Weaver creates and performs in varied and vivid styles both in Canada and the United States. She is Associate Professor of Music at Conrad Grebel College/University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada. "Song of the Lost" appears on *Daughter of Olapa, The Music of Carol Ann Weaver*, available from 132 Avondale Ave., S, Waterloo, ON, N2L 2C3, Canada. The CD *Carol Ann Weaver—Journey Begun with Cate Friesen*, vocalist will be available early 1999.**



*Untitled*  
by Susan McKay

#### Women in ministry

**Anna Stutzman Janzen** was installed as youth minister at Warwick River Mennonite Church, Newport News, Va.

**Bryce and Sue Lund** were installed as associate pastoral couple in Kingsburg (Calif.) MB church.

by Cathryn Clinton Hoellworth

## Silencing

stop them, those feet, dancing,  
    twirling, twisting, skipping feet  
march, march,  
one black stockinged shoe  
    after the other, yes  
march  
that mouth speaks like summer  
    hot ripened vision,  
    Quick preserve it, this  
brine, sweet-sour  
    preserves words.  
those eyes,  
see what should not be seen, here, quilt them  
shut  
    with patches, our pieces  
cover rips, tears, we sew  
them with this fine colored thread,  
    call it peace.

**Cathryn lives in Lancaster County, Pa., while parenting a 19- and 17-year-old and completing a master of fine arts program in children's writing at Vermont College. She has published poetry and a children's book, *The Underbed*.**

## Letter

I affirm the willingness of *Women's Concerns Report* to compile the July–August issue for I believe the decision to do so was not made lightly. I read it with mixed feelings—grateful that finally an attempt was made to give our lesbian sisters a voice but saddened that the personal voice was almost lost in the effort to present differing views of the homosexual discussion.

Thanks for the work that was done to publish this issue. I encourage us all as sisters in Christ to not see this as a task that is completed but for what it is, a beginning step in listening. The reason I say this is that my life has been deeply blessed because I have listened.

Blessings and peace,

*Mary Martin, Waterloo, Ontario*

WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT is published bimonthly by the MCC Committees on Women's Concerns. We believe that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committees strive to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures through which women and men can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in REPORT do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committees on Women's Concerns.

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## News and verbs

Goshen College is accepting applications for a **full-time tenure-track position in world history**, with particular focus on African, Middle Eastern or Asian history. Ph.D. completed before August 1999 is required. Review of applications will begin on Jan. 5, 1999. Send curriculum vitae and letter to Paul A. Keim, Academic Dean, Goshen College, Goshen IN 46526 or E-mail: dean@goshen.edu. Women and members of under-represented groups are encouraged to apply.

*Rooted and Branching: Women Worldwide* is a collection of stories from various countries, edited by Dorothy Yoder Nyce. Copies are available from Kathleen Fernando Peiris, P.O. Box 218, Notre Dame, IN 46556. Single copies are \$11.00 U.S., five or more are \$7.00 U.S. each, plus postage.

Elaine Sommers Rich's ninth book, *Pondered in Her Heart—Hannah's Book: Inside and Outside* is the story of Hannah Shrock Hershberger, a feisty 78-year-old woman in a retirement community. The book is available from the author at 112 S. Spring, Bluffton, OH 45817, or from the publisher at Wordsworth, 702 NE 24th St., Newton, KS 67114-9275. The cost is \$12.95 U.S. plus postage.



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